

УДК: 82.1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17015/aas.2021.211.29>

## A CONTEMPORARY MANASCHI IN ORAL PERFORMANCE AND IN PRINT

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### Abstract

This study examines the vocabulary density and the frequency of unique and repeated lines of a contemporary manaschi in oral performance and in print. Transcriptions of audiovisual recordings of Talantaaly Bakchiev (b. 1971) performing are compared with two volumes of Manas narratives that he published. The research reveals that the published versions have a higher vocabulary density than the oral performance, have a greater percentage of unique lines and less repetitions. This suggests that the medium in which the metrical narrative is presented is reflected in the language, and indications of orality are absent from written variants.

**Keywords:** Manas Epos, Talantaaly Bakchiev, Orality, Print, Vocabulary Density.

### АЗЫРКЫ МАНАСЧЫНЫН БАСМАДАГЫ ЖАНА ООЗ ЭКИ АЙТУУСУ

#### Кыскача мазмуну

Бул изилдөө азыркы манасчынын оозеки айтуусунда жана басмада кездешкен уникалдуу жана кайталанма саптарынын жыштыгын жана сөз байлыгынын тыгыздыгын изилдейт. Талантаалы Бакчиевдин (1971-ж.) айтуусундагы аудиовизуалдык жазуулардын транскрипциясы ал жарыялаган “Манастын” эки томдук окуялары менен салыштырылат. Изилдөө көрсөткөндөй, жарыяланган версияларда оозеки аткарууга караганда сөздүк кордун тыгыздыгы жогору, уникалдуу саптардын пайызы да жогору жана азыраак кайталанат. Бул метрикалык баяндама сунушталган чөйрө тилде чагылдырылгандыгын, ал эми жазуу жүзүндө оозеки айтуунун белгилери жок экендигин көрсөтүп турат.

**Ачкыч сөздөр:** “Манас” эпосу, Талантаалы Бакчиев, оозеки айтуу, басма, сөз байлыгынын тыгыздыгы.

### СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ МАНАСЧИ В УСТНОМ ИСПОЛНЕНИИ И В ПЕЧАТИ

#### Аннотация

В этом исследовании изучается плотность словарного запаса и частота уникальных и повторяющихся строк современного манасчи в устном исполнении и в печати. Транскрипции аудиовизуальных записей исполнения Талантаалы Бакчиева (1971 г. р.) сравниваются с двумя томами рассказов Манаса, которые он опубликовал. Исследова-

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ние показало, что опубликованные версии имеют более высокую плотность словарного запаса, чем устное исполнение, имеют больший процент уникальных строк и меньше повторов. Это говорит о том, что среда, в которой представлено метрическое повествование, отражена в языке, а указания на устность отсутствуют в письменных вариантах.

**Ключевые слова:** Эпос Манас, Талантаалы Бакчиев, оральность, печать, плотность словарного запаса.

This study compares the vocabulary density and the frequency of unique and repeated lines of a contemporary *manaschi* in oral performance and in print. Transcriptions of three audiovisual recordings of Talantaaly Bakchiev (b. 1971) made by the Analyzing Kyrgyz Narratives (AKYN) research group at the American University of Central Asia are compared to his published metrical narratives, *Almabettin zhomogy* (2012) and *Manastin Ashi* (2011). When asked about this difference calculated in the article that follows, Bakchiev noted that he was more conscious when writing than when performing; these data establishes the degree of the difference. The printed episodes show a higher vocabulary density than oral performance, a larger number of unique lines, and less repetition of particular lines. This establishes that a *manaschi*, in writing (and preparing) a version for publication, removes elements that are the hallmark of oral performance that, in a written text, would be seen as repetitive. This study therefore shows the distinct differences between oral and written variants, a feature frequently

suggested in scholarship, which, with this approach facilitated with digital resources, can be statistically established.

This study continues previous work done by the AKYN group. To examine the current state of oral performances of the *Manas* tradition, AKYN recorded, on separate occasions, six performances. The same part of the epos – the birth of the titular character, *Manas* – was recorded in order to examine how a *manaschi* constructs their narrative in performance and the degree to which improvisation, formulaic expressions, and repeated passages are present. Study of variants greatly assists such investigation. For comparative purposes, two performers were recorded: Talantaaly Bakchiev, and Doolot Sydykov (b. 1983). Analysis revealed that the two performers construct their narratives in performance with the aid of formulas, single (or more) lines used when the performer ‘wishes (or needs) to pause, make emphasis, or change the episode in the narrative’ (Plumtree and Jeenbekova, 2020, p. 180; Plumtree, 2019). Computer-assisted comparison of the six transcripts revealed that a type-

token ratio analysis, in which the number of unique word forms (the ‘types’) are divided by the total number of words (the ‘tokens’), divided the transcripts into two clear groups that matched the manaschis, suggesting that variants display linguistic features that identify the performer (Plumtree, under review). Comparison of the transcripts of these oral performances with earlier printed variants helped establish the relationship contemporary manaschis have with their predecessors and the tradition.

For this study, the three AKYN performances are those of Bakchiev made in 2017. Transcriptions, made from these audiovisual recordings by Alymkan Jeenbekova, are respectively labeled T1, T2, and T3. Use of the online text-analysis application Voyant Tools produced the following data (Table 1).

	Number of Lines	Total Words	Total Unique Word Forms	Total Vocab. Density	Average Words per Sentence
T <sub>1</sub>	973	3,323	1,050	0.316	17.4
T <sub>2</sub>	1,016	3,315	1,143	0.345	35.6
T <sub>3</sub>	1,854	6,054	1,670	0.276	38.1

Table 1

Note though that for this material, the average words per sentence statistics are reflective of the work of the transcriber rather than the performer. In order to make these texts of different lengths comparative, the first hundred lines (FHL) of each transcription were analyzed. This information is provided below (Table 2).

	Words in FHL	Unique words in FHL	Vocab. Density in FHL	Average Words per Sentence in FHL
T <sub>1</sub>	340	200	0.588	26.2
T <sub>2</sub>	332	218	0.657	23.7
T <sub>3</sub>	328	204	0.622	46.9

Table 2

As shown in a recent study (Plumtree forthcoming), these data, when compared with three transcribed oral performances by Sydykov, revealed two distinct groups when plotted on a graph that correlated with the two performers. This suggests that such statistical studies of texts can reveal linguistic characteristics of individual performers.

To investigate whether Bakchiev is the same in print, the same methodology was applied to two published variants: Almabetin zhomogy (henceforth BAZ) and Manastin Ashi (BMA). Hard copies of these volumes, kindly made available by Bakchiev, were scanned, and, with the use of an optical character recognition programme, turned into text files. Details for BAZ, first as a whole text, and then divided by chapter (e.g. BAZ1 is the first chapter of BAZ) is presented below (Table 3).

	Number of Lines	Total Words	Total Unique Word Forms	Total Vocab. Density	Average Words per Sentence
BAZ	7,603	24,617	7,822	0.318	9.6
BAZ <sub>1</sub>	1,371	4,528	2,220	0.490	9.0
BAZ <sub>2</sub>	370	1,192	774	0.649	10.6
BAZ <sub>3</sub>	235	775	524	0.676	10.3
BAZ <sub>4</sub>	847	2,716	1,612	0.594	9.3
BAZ <sub>5</sub>	274	882	611	0.693	10.1
BAZ <sub>6</sub>	390	1,252	808	0.645	10.4
BAZ <sub>7</sub>	166	542	383	0.707	10.0
BAZ <sub>8</sub>	145	471	353	0.749	10.0
BAZ <sub>9</sub>	115	372	291	0.782	10.9
BAZ <sub>10</sub>	781	2,436	1,452	0.596	9.6
BAZ <sub>11</sub>	657	2,100	1,334	0.635	9.8
BAZ <sub>12</sub>	1,108	3,590	2,006	0.559	10.1
BAZ <sub>13</sub>	207	692	494	0.714	10.3
BAZ <sub>14</sub>	232	771	573	0.743	10.7
BAZ <sub>15</sub>	210	680	507	0.746	8.5
BAZ <sub>16</sub>	495	1,618	1,011	0.625	8.5

Table 3

For comparative purposes, statistics for the first hundred lines of each chapter are presented below (Table 4). The vocabulary density in each of the FHL is higher than that of the FHL of the three oral performances presented earlier in Table 2.

	Words in FHL	Unique words in FHL	Vocab. Density it FHL	Average Words per Sentence in FHL
BAZ <sub>1</sub>	323	264	0.817	9.8
BAZ <sub>2</sub>	316	248	0.785	12.2
BAZ <sub>3</sub>	319	253	0.793	11.0
BAZ <sub>4</sub>	313	238	0.760	8.7
BAZ <sub>5</sub>	328	233	0.710	9.1
BAZ <sub>6</sub>	321	259	0.807	10.7
BAZ <sub>7</sub>	298	219	0.735	9.3
BAZ <sub>8</sub>	329	249	0.757	9.4
BAZ <sub>9</sub>	321	259	0.807	11.1
BAZ <sub>10</sub>	319	248	0.777	10.6
BAZ <sub>11</sub>	328	259	0.790	9.4
BAZ <sub>12</sub>	334	260	0.778	10.1
BAZ <sub>13</sub>	327	268	0.820	11.7
BAZ <sub>14</sub>	332	270	0.813	10.1
BAZ <sub>15</sub>	317	267	0.842	9.6
BAZ <sub>16</sub>	322	244	0.758	9.5

Table 4

Likewise, the details for BMA are as follows (Table 5).

	Number of Lines	Total Words	Total Unique Word Forms	Total Vocab. Density	Average Words per Sentence
BMA	8,677	28,145	8,524	0.303	11.0
BMA <sub>1</sub>	585	1,898	1,171	0.617	10.1
BMA <sub>2</sub>	535	1,733	1,115	0.643	11.6
BMA <sub>3</sub>	1,328	4,376	2,100	0.480	11.9
BMA <sub>4</sub>	652	2,142	1,296	0.605	12.3
BMA <sub>5</sub>	738	2,415	1,430	0.592	11.6
BMA <sub>6</sub>	509	1,641	1,048	0.639	11.4
BMA <sub>7</sub>	683	2,227	1,312	0.589	10.9
BMA <sub>8</sub>	287	929	669	0.720	9.4
BMA <sub>9</sub>	671	2,128	1,416	0.665	10.7
BMA <sub>10</sub>	240	784	566	0.722	11.9
BMA <sub>11</sub>	627	2,057	1,237	0.601	9.8
BMA <sub>12</sub>	667	2,103	1,330	0.632	10.2
BMA <sub>13</sub>	920	2,943	1,690	0.574	10.9
BMA <sub>14</sub>	235	769	541	0.704	11.5

Table 5

As with BAZ, when assessing the FHL of each chapter of BMA (Table 6, below), each figure is higher than the

FHL of the three oral performances presented earlier in Table 2.

	Words in FHL	Unique words in FHL	Vocab. Density it FHL	Average Words per Sentence in FHL
BMA <sub>1</sub>	334	260	0.778	8.8
BMA <sub>2</sub>	327	269	0.823	9.9
BMA <sub>3</sub>	329	258	0.784	11.0
BMA <sub>4</sub>	340	259	0.762	14.8
BMA <sub>5</sub>	341	265	0.777	12.6
BMA <sub>6</sub>	333	255	0.766	10.1
BMA <sub>7</sub>	319	248	0.777	9.1
BMA <sub>8</sub>	304	251	0.826	10.1
BMA <sub>9</sub>	347	239	0.689	9.9
BMA <sub>10</sub>	330	267	0.809	13.8
BMA <sub>11</sub>	312	253	0.811	11.1
BMA <sub>12</sub>	312	257	0.824	10.4
BMA <sub>13</sub>	311	267	0.859	10.4
BMA <sub>14</sub>	323	266	0.824	10.8

Table 6

These statistics show that the number of unique word forms is significantly higher in Bakchiev's printed versions than in his oral performances. A visual comparison of all the texts, Figure 1 below, shows two distinct batches: the first containing the published texts, and the second, the transcriptions of the oral performances.

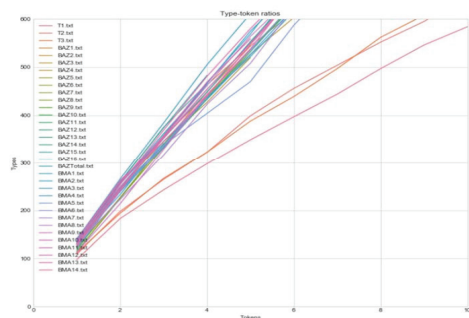


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates that the type-token ratio of the printed narratives and the oral transcriptions are distinct.

A similar distinction between the oral performance and the published metrical narratives is visible when assessing the feature of unique lines and repeated lines. A ‘unique line’ is a metrical line that appears only once in the entire text. As Table 7 shows, the percentage of unique lines is significantly higher in the published versions than in the transcriptions of oral performances.

	Unique Lines	Total Lines	Percentage
T <sub>1</sub>	640	973	65.77
T <sub>2</sub>	685	1,016	67.42
T <sub>3</sub>	1,155	1,854	62.29
BAZ	7,007	7,603	92.16
BMA	7,968	8,667	91.93

Table 7

The numbers for the transcriptions are perhaps higher than they should be since the numbers include a line with an interjection as distinct (e.g. ‘Оо өзүң көргөн баягы’ and ‘Өзүң көргөн баягы’ are considered different). Analysis of the number of lines repeated similarly displays a difference between the printed and the orally produced. Table 8 shows how the transcriptions featured repeated lines used in greater numbers than in the published metrical narratives.

Frequency a line is repeated	BAZ	BMA	T <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>2</sub>	T <sub>3</sub>
46	-	-	-	-	1
38	-	-	-	1	-
26	-	-	-	-	2
24	-	-	1	-	-
22	-	-	1	-	-
21	-	-	1	-	-
17	-	-	-	-	1
14	-	-	-	-	1
11	-	1	1	1	1
10	-	-	2	1	1
9	1	-	-	1	3
8	1	1	1	1	4
7	1	2	3	2	5
6	2	2	4	4	4
5	2	3	4	3	7
4	6	20	7	11	16
3	34	41	12	18	26
2	212	223	49	52	127

Table 8

To emphasize how much the transcribed oral performances feature repeated lines, below are the three most frequently used lines with their numbers in brackets followed by the percentage of how much of the text their usage is. (For BMA, where there is are two lines with seven appearances, both are included for comparison, but only one seven is included in the percentage.) In addition to the significant difference in the amount of times such repetitions are used, there also seems to be a functional distinction between the use of repeated lines in the written and the oral performances. The few lines repeated in the written variants appear to be establishing concrete features in the text, while the more numerous repeated lines in the oral performances appear to be filler used to provide a brief pause to assist the *manaschi*.

**BAZ**  
 Ар качандан бир качан (9)  
 Кагылайын Манасым (8)  
 Кайсы бирин айтайын (7)  
 Percentage of text: 0.31%

**BMA**  
 Деп ошентип Семетей (11)  
 Кечээ Көкөтөйдүн ашында (8)  
 \* Ал аңгыча болгон жок (7)  
 \* Көк асаба кызыл туу (7)  
 Percentage of text: 0.29%

**T<sub>1</sub>**  
 Атаңдын көрү дүнүйө (24)  
 Атаганат дүнүйө (22)  
 Айланайын кудурет (21)  
 Percentage of text: 6.88%

**T<sub>2</sub>**  
 Айланайын кудурет (38)  
 Айланайын байым деп (11)  
 Атаганат дүнүйө (10)  
 Percentage of text: 5.80%

**T<sub>3</sub>**  
 Айланайын кудурет (46)  
 Атаганат дүнүйө (26)  
 Мына ошондо жарыктык (26)  
 Percentage of text: 5.28%

This makes visible the different use of such lines in oral and print productions. Bakchiev, in oral performance, the most repeated metrical lines are those used to give him time; in his written narratives, such lines are noticeably absent. When repetition is used in the written narratives, it appears, seemingly, for the purpose of the plot. As with the vocabulary density and type-token ratios, the difference between oral and written narratives

The printed volumes, a product of a different context of creation to oral performance, have a greater vocabulary density than the transcribed oral variants and lack the repetitions that are a key feature of oral performance. This brief study supports a frequent assumption that, though sharing the same metrical format, written texts and texts produced in oral performance differ in construction. The impact of this distinction upon the tradition, and the influence of printed variants upon appreciation of the epos and assessment of individual performers, is a subject still to be explored. A potential – and feasible – approach may be to study using the method above of a manaschi's oral and written productions from different periods of their career. Doing so may chart the development of a performer while also indicating further patterns regarding the relationship between orality and writing.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Talantaaly Bakchiev, in addition to permitting recording of his performances, graciously discussed and answered questions while the research and conclusions were independently accomplished.

The AMICAL Consortium programme enabled by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supported the early stage of the research, facilitating audiovisual recordings made by Kamila Baimurtova, and transcriptions by Alymkan Jeenbekova. Further study was facilitated by an AUCA Faculty Research Grant, and a fellowship for Digital Scholarship sponsored by Elsevier at the Scalinger Institute and Centre for Digital Scholarship, Leiden University.

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